
IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF UTAH

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

v.

TONATIUH TACUBA PALACIOS,

Defendant.

**MEMORANDUM DECISION AND
ORDER CONTINUING TRIAL
AND EXCLUDING TIME
UNDER THE SPEEDY TRIAL ACT**

Case No. 4:19-CR-142 DN

District Judge David Nuffer

This Order Continuing Trial and Excluding Time Under the Speedy Trial Act is entered in response to the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease (“COVID-19”) in the District of Utah.

On March 13, 2020, a National Emergency was declared in response to the nationwide outbreak, which the World Health Organization has declared a global pandemic. As of April 15, 2020, there have been over 618,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States which have caused over 27,000 deaths. This is over four times as many COVID-19 cases as any other country.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) has issued guidance to combat the spread of COVID-19, and to promote the health and well-being of the nation. This guidance includes recommendations that all Americans avoid close contact with others (*i.e.*, being within six feet) and wear cloth face coverings in public or when around others. Despite this guidance, the CDC continues to report approximately 30,000 new COVID-19 cases in the United States each day. And available evidence suggests there is difficulty in accurately tracking the spread of COVID-19 because many cases go undetected due to varying degrees of symptoms and a lack of available testing.

In Utah, as of April 15, 2020, there have been over 2,500 confirmed COVID-19 cases, which have caused 20 deaths. Governor Gary Herbert has declared a state of emergency and has issued a “Stay Safe, Stay Home” directive to all Utahns. The directive was initially set to expire on April 13, 2020, but was extended through May 1, 2020. Governor Herbert also extended the “soft closure” of all public schools for the remainder of the school year (*i.e.*, May 13, 2020, to June 5, 2020, depending on the school).

Additionally, Chief Judge Robert J. Shelby has issued several General Court Orders in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the District of Utah. [General Order 20-008](#) placed restrictions on visitors to the District’s courthouse effective March 12, 2020, until further order. [General Order 20-009](#) postponed most civil and criminal proceedings, and included findings and conclusions for an “ends of justice” exclusion of time under the Speedy Trial Act¹ for all criminal cases in the District from March 16, 2020, through May 1, 2020. [General Order 20-010](#) modified court operations for some criminal proceedings and offender supervision effective March 23, 2020, until further order. And [General Order 20-011](#) expanded video and teleconferencing capabilities for criminal proceedings under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act effective March 31, 2020, and continuing for 90 days.

An “ends of justice” exclusion of time under the Speedy Trial Act is disfavored and “was meant to be a rarely used tool for those cases demanding more flexible treatment.”² However, based on the ongoing nature of the COVID-19 outbreak in the District, the effect of national and local public health recommendations and directives (including restrictions on travel and the availability of hotel accommodations), and the findings and conclusions in Chief Judge Shelby’s

¹ 18 U.S.C. § 3161(h)(7)(A).

² *United States v. Toombs*, 574 F.3d 1262, 1269 (10th Cir. 2009).

General Orders 20-009 through 20-011, it is necessary and appropriate to continue trial in this case and exclude time under the Speedy Trial Act. The expanding number of COVID-19 cases and deaths nationally, and in Utah, and Governor Herbert's extension of the "Stay Safe, Stay Home" directive and "soft closure" of public schools demand modifications in court practices to protect the public health. Courts and court operations are necessarily social operations, involving many people.

The need to protect the health of the public in the midst of a deadly pandemic outweighs the rights of Defendant and the public to a speedy trial. Moreover, there is a significantly reduced ability to obtain an adequate spectrum of jurors and available counsel, witnesses, and court personnel to be present in the courtroom for trial. Empaneling a jury, conducting a trial, and arranging jury deliberations, with due regard for health and safety, is not possible in the physical facilities available to the court. Video and audio conferencing, used for hearings, are not available for trials. Counsel's ability to adequately prepare for trial, including locating and consulting with witnesses, and defense counsel's ability to confer with Defendant, under these circumstances is also greatly reduced.

A failure to continue trial under these circumstances would result in a miscarriage of justice³ and would deny counsel for the government and Defendant the reasonable time necessary for effective preparation, taking into account the exercise of due diligence.⁴ Therefore, the ends of justice served by such a continuance outweigh the best interests of the public and Defendant in a speedy trial.⁵

³ 18 U.S.C. § 3161(h)(7)(B)(i).

⁴ *Id.* § 3161(h)(7)(B)(iv).

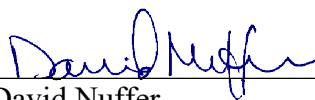
⁵ *Id.* § 3161(h)(7)(A).

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED the 2-day jury trial previously scheduled to begin on May 12, 2020, is continued to the 23rd day of June, 2020, at 9:00 a.m. Accordingly, the time from the entry of this Memorandum Decision and Order, April 27, 2020, and the new trial date, June 23, 2020, is excluded from Defendant's speedy trial computation for good cause.

Signed April 21, 2020.

BY THE COURT

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Nuffer", is written over a horizontal line.

David Nuffer
United States District Judge